AL-FIQH AL-AKBAR

by Imam Abu Hanifah

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The following sets out precisely all the main beliefs (i'tiqadat = spiritual convictions) of the Sunni-Hanafi school of law (madhab/maslak)

The following statement appears before the translation of the actual text -- obviously inserted by someone other than Imam Abu Hanifah -- probably by the eminent translator himself. -- Editor . . . "One of the most regrettable features of the contemporary Muslim situation is an anarchy and confusion in the sphere of belief that might lead one to suppose the foundations of Islam to have been so obscured that the field is open to anyone to redefine the religion. We begin with the Fiqh al-Akbar *of Imam al-A'zam Abu Hanifah, may God be pleased with him, a brief but comprehensive statement of the irreducible dogmas (* ‘aqa’id - sing.‘aqidah*) of Islam."*

The editor agrees with the above comments of Professor Hamid Algar, the translator, and joins him in his lamentation of the contemporary Muslim situation of anarchy and confusion in the 'sphere of belief.' Alas our modern younger generation has neglected to include 'Al-Fiqh Al-Akbar' *as an essntial part of Islamic teaching curricula.*

I recall fondly that 'Al-Fiqh Al-Akbar' *was a part of my highschool religion classes. I also remember, with fondness, the diligence with which our teachers taught these* 'aqa'id, *impressing upon us incessantly just how essential it was for us to learn these dogmas. Even as a highschool student it was not was not difficult for me to realize the beauty of the brevity, conciseness, and comprehensivenss of the beautiful work of Imam Abu Hanifah. Even as a student at this early stage of education, we were left with no doubt in our minds that a full understanding of the articles of Abu Hanifah's creed were imperative for our practises as a Sunni-Hanafi followers of Islam.]*

Some time in the future, Insha-Allah, we will try to reproduce on this website the Arabic text and the Urdu translation of this Important work, which has been preserved in the treasure house of my Alma Mater, Osmania University, Hyderabad.]

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The root of the affirmation of God's unity, and that which is correct conviction, consists of this, that one says:

1. I believe in God, and His angels, and His books, and His messengers, and resurrection after death, and that the good and evil of destiny are from God Most High. I believe too in the accounting and the scales, hell and paradise. All the foregoing is reality.

2. God is One, not in a numerical sense, but in the sense that He has no partner – "Say: He is God, One; God the Eternally Subsistent and Besought; He begets not, nor was He begotten; and there is none like unto Him." He resembles nothing among His creation, nor does anything among His creation resemble Him. He has been, unceasing, and He is, unceasing, with His names and attributes, both those relating to His Essence and those relating to His acts. As for those relating to His Essence, they are life, power, knowledge, speech, hearing, sight, and will. As for those relating to His acts, they are creativity, sustenance, originating and fashioning *ex nihilo*, making, and other active attributes.

He has been, unceasing, and He is, unceasing, with His attributes and names; neither attribute nor name was created. He has always and unceasingly been a knower, by virtue of His knowledge, and His knowledge is a pre-eternal attribute. He has always and unceasingly been powerful, by virtue of His power, and His power is a pre-eternal attribute. He has always and unceasingly been speaking by virtue of His speech and His speech is a pre-eternal attribute. He has always and unceasingly been a creator, by virtue of His creativity, and His creativity is a pre-eternal attribute. He has always and unceasingly been an agent, by virtue of His activity, and His activity is a pre-eternal attribute; the object of His activity is creation, and His activity is uncreated. His attributes existed in pre-eternity, without being created or called into existence at a particular moment. Whoever says that they are created or summoned into existence at a particular moment, or is uncertain about the attributes and doubts them, is an unbeliever in God Almighty.

3. The Qur'an is the Word of God Almighty, written on collections of leaves (*masahif*), preserved in men's hearts, recited on men's tongues, and sent down to the Prophet, upon whom be God's peace and blessings. Our uttering of the Qur'an is created, and our recitation of the Qur'an is created, but the Qur'an itself is uncreated.

That which God Almighty mentions in the Qur'an as a narration from Moses and other of the prophets – peace and blessings be upon them - and also from the Pharaoh and Iblis, all of it is God's word, and constitutes a report concerning them. God's word is uncreated. It is the Qur'an which as the word of God Most High is uncreated, not their words, Moses, upon whom be peace, heard the Word of God Almighty, as God Almighty says: "God addressed Moses in speech." Thus God Almighty was the speaker, and Moses, upon whom be peace, did not speak. God Most High was a creator in pre-eternity, even without having brought creation into existence: "there is naught like unto Him; He is All-Hearing, All-Seeing." When God addressed Moses He did so with His word that was, like all of His attributes, an attribute existing from pre-eternity, unlike the attributes of created beings.

4. God knows, but not as we know; He has power, but not as we have power; He sees, but not as we see; He hears, but not as we hear; and He speaks, but not as we speak. We speak by means of the speech organs and sounds, whereas God Most High speaks with neither organs nor sounds. Sounds are created, and the word of God Most High is uncreated. He is a thing, but unlike other things; by saying "thing," we intend merely to affirm His reality. He has neither body nor substance, neither accidental property nor limit, neither opposite nor like nor similitude. He has a hand, a face, and a self (*nafs*); the mention that God most High has made of these in the Qur'an has the sense that these are among His attributes, and no question can be raised concerning their modality (*bila kayf*). It cannot be said that His hand represents His power of His bestowal of bounty, because such an interpretation would require a negation of an attribute. This is the path taken by the Qadarites and the Mu'tazilites (*two theological sects in early Islam that deviated from the path of Ahl as-Sunna - trans.*) Rather, His hand is an attribute, of unknowable modality, in the same way that His anger and pleasure are two attributes of unknowable modality God Most High created things out of nothing, and He had knowledge of them in pre-eternity, before their creation.

5. He it is Who determined and predestined all things. Nothing exists in this world or hereafter except by His will, His knowledge, His determining and predestining, and except it be written on the Preserved Tablet (*al-Lauh al-Mahfuz*). He inscribed everything there in the sense of description, not that of foreordaining. Determining, predestining and will are pre-eternal attributes of unknowable modality. God Most High knows the non-existent, while in its state of non-existence, to be non-existent, and He knows too how it will be when He brings it forth into being. God Most High knows the existent, while in its state of existence, to be existent, and He knows too how will be its evanescence. God knows the one who is standing, and when he sits then God knows him to be sitting, without any change being produced thereby in God's knowledge, or any new knowledge accruing to Him. For change and alteration occur only in created beings.

6. God Most High created creation free of both belief and unbelief, and then He addressed His creation with commands and prohibitions. Some men disbelieved through active denial and rejection of the truth by virtue of being abandoned by God Most High. Others believed through active assent and affirmation, by virtue of the succor of God Most High. He brought forth the progeny of Adam, upon whombe peace, from his loins in the form of particles, and appointed for them an intelligence. He then addressed them and commanded them unto belief

and forbade them disbelief. They assented to His dominicality, this being a form of belief appropriate to them, and thus it is that they are born in the possession of a primordial nature disposed to belief.

Whoever disbelieves thereafter is therefore changing and altering that primordial nature, and whoever believes and assents is conforming and strengthening it. None of His creation has been constrained either to disbelieve or to believe; God created men not as believers or non-believers, but rather as persons. Belief and disbelief are acts of God's worshippers. God Most High knows the unbeliever, in his state of unbelief, to be an unbeliever, and if he thereafter becomes a believer, then God knows him to be a believer in a state of belief, without any change occurring thereby in His knowledge or attributes.

All deeds of God's servants, both of commission and omission, are in truth acquired by them; God Most High is their creator. All of them take place by His will, knowledge, determining and predestining. Obligatory acts of obedience and worship take place by the command, love, satisfaction, knowledge, will, determining and predestining of God Most High, and all facts of sinful rebellion take place by His knowledge, determining, and predestining and will, but not by His love, satisfaction and command.

7. The Prophets, peace and blessings be upon them, are free of all sins, major and minor, of unbelief, and of all that is repugnant. It may be, however, that they commit insignificant lapses and errors. Muhammad the Messenger of God -- may God's peace and blessings be upon him! -- is His Prophet, His Bondsman, His Messenger and His Chosen One. He never worshipped idols, he never assigned partner to God, even for an instant, and he never committed a sin, major or minor.

8. The most virtuous of all men after the Messenger of God, -- may God's peace and blessings be upon him! -- are Abu Bakr as-Siddiq, may God be pleased with him; then 'Umar ibn al-Khattab; then 'Uthman ibn 'Affan; the 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, may they all enjoy the pleasure of God Most High. They were all steadfast in the truth, with the truth, and we proclaim our allegiance to all of them. We make only good mention of all of the Companions of the Messenger of God, may God's peace and blessings be upon him!

9. We do not proclaim any Muslim an unbeliever on account of any sin, however great, unless it be that he regards his sin as permissible. Nor does he forfeit the name of belief; we continue to call him a believer in essence. It is possible to be a sinful believer without being an unbeliever.

The wiping of the feet when covered, by way of ablution, is a *sunna* (under conditions specified by the *fuqaha*). *Tarawih* prayer in the month of Ramadan is similarly a *sunna*. It is permissible to pray behind any believer, pious or sinful. We say neither that sins do not harm the believer, nor that they cause him to remain indefinitely in hell, even if he leaves the world in a state of sin.

10. We do not say, like Murji'ites (*an early theological school - trans.*), that our good deeds are accepted by God, and our evil deeds forgiven by Him. Rather we say that the matter is to be clarified and expounded as follows: whoever performs a good deed in accordance with all requisite conditions, free of all corrupting deficiencies and nullifying concerns, and does not then cancel his deed with unbelief or apostasy at any time before his death, God Almighty will not cause his deed to be wasted; rather He will accept it and bestow reward for it. As for evil deeds – other than the assigning of partners to God and unbelief – for which the believer does not offer repentance before his death, the will of God Almighty may elect either to chastise their author or to forgive him, without chastising him in Hellfire. Hypocrisy and arrogance in any deed annul its reward.

11. Miraculous signs (*mu'jizat)* bestowed on the Prophets are established as true, and so too ennobling wonders (*karamat*) made manifest through the saints (*auliya*). As for apparently miraculous and wondrous deeds performed by God's enemies, like Iblis, the Pharaoh and the Dajjal, whatever is mentioned in tradition as having been performed by them in future, is neither miraculous nor wondrous. Rather it is a question of their needs being fulfilled by God Most High; this he does in order to lead them toward destruction and to chastise them, but they are deceived. They increase in rebelliousness and unbelief. All of the foregoing is possible and contingent on God's will.

12. God Most High was a Creator before He created, and a Provider before He bestowed provision. God Most

High will be seen in the Hereafter, visible to the believers in Paradise with their corporeal vision. This we say without any implication of anthropomorphism, or any notion of quality or quantity, for there is not a fixed distance between Him and His creation (to permit any comparison).

13. Belief means assent and affirmation. There is no increase of decrease with respect to the content of belief, whether for angels or men, but only with respect to degrees of certainty and affirmation. The believers are equal in what they believe and in their assertion of the divine unity, but enjoy differing degrees of excellence with respect to their deeds.
Islam is surrender and submission to the commands of God Most High. There is a lexical distinction between belief (*iman*) and Islam, but there is no belief without Islam, and Islam cannot be conceived of without belief. They are like the outer and inner aspect of a thing (that is inseparable). Religion (*din*) is a name applied to both belief and Islam, and indeed to all divine codes.

We know God as it is fitting for us to know Him through His description of himself in His Book, with all His attributes; but none is able to worship God Most High as He deserves to be worshipped and as is fitting for Him. Rather man worships God Most High in accordance with His Command, as promulgated in His Book and the *Sunna* of His Messenger. Although believers are equal insofar as they believe, they differ with respect to knowledge, certainty, reliance, love satisfaction, fear, hope.

14. God Most High is both generous and just toward His bondsmen, bestowing on them in his liberality a reward far in excess of what they deserve. He requites them for their sins because of His justice, and forgives them because of His generosity. The intercession of the Prophets, upon whom be blessings and peace, is a reality, and in particular that of our Prophet – peace and blessings be upon him! -- for sinful believers and for those who have committed major sins and are deserving of requital is a firmly established reality. The weighing of deeds in the balance on the Day of Resurrection is similarly a reality; the pool of the Prophet, upon whom be peace and blessings, is a reality; retribution among enemies on the Day of Resurrection through the redistribution of good deeds is a reality. If they have no good deeds, then the burden of evil deeds is redistributed; this too is a reality.

Paradise and Hell are created and existing today, and shall never vanish. The houris shall never vanish, and the requital exacted by God Almighty and the reward bestowed by Him shall never cease.

God Most High guides whomsoever he wills out of His generosity, and he leads astray whomsoever He wills out of His justice. God’s leading man astray consists of His abandoning him, and the meaning of God’s abandoning man is not impelling him to do that which is pleasing to Him. All this is determined by His justice.

It is not permissible for us to say: "Satan steals belief from man with violence and coercion." Rather we say: "Man himself abandons belief, and when he has abandoned it, then Satan snatches it from him."
The interrogation by Munkir and Nakir is a reality; the return of the spirit to the body in the tomb is a reality; the pressing in upon man of the tomb is a reality; God’s punishment of all unbelievers and some Muslims is a reality.

All of the attributes of God Most High – may His name be glorified and his attributes be exalted! -- may be mentioned by the *‘ulama* in languages other than Arabic (*here Persian in particular is mentioned, but the meaning is any non-Arabic tongue - trans.*), with the exception of *yad* (hand). Thus we may say "the face of God," may He be exalted and glorified, without any implication of anthropomorphism or of a particular modality.

Closeness to God Most High and remoteness from Him do not refer to any spatial distance, great or small, nor do they refer to the nobility or humility or man in His sight. Rather the one obedient to Him is close to him, in indefinable fashion. Closeness, remoteness [or] approaching all, in fact refer to God’s action towards man (i.e., it is not man who in the strict sense defines relation to God; it is rather God who determines that relation). Proximity to God in Paradise and standing before Him are similarly realities of indefinable modality.

The Qur’an was sent down to His Messenger, upon whom be blessings and peace, and it is that which is now inscribed on collections of leaves. The verses of the Qur’an, insofar as they are all the Word of God, are equal in excellence and magnificence; some, however, enjoy a special excellence by virtue of what they mention, or the fashion in which they mention it. The Throne Verse, for example, enjoys excellence on both counts: what it

mentions – splendor, magnificence and other attributes of God – and the way in which it mentions it. Other verses have no excellence on account of what they mention – for example, those containing narratives of unbelievers – but only on account of the way in which they mention it. Similarly, all the names and attributes are equal in their magnificence and excellence; there is no difference among them.

If someone experiences difficulty with the subtleties of the science of divine unity, it is incumbent upon him to believe (without further investigation) what is correct in the sight of God Most High until he finds a scholar to consult. He should not delay in seeking such a scholar, for hesitation and suspension of judgment may result in unbelief.

The narration of the Mi'raj (by the Prophet, upon him be peace and blessings) is true, and whoever rejects it is misguided and an innovator.

The emergence of the Dajjal and of Gog and Magog is a reality; the rising of the sun in the West is a reality; the descent of Jesus ('Isa), upon whom be peace, from the heavens is a reality; and all the other signs of the Day of Resurrection, as contained in authentic traditions, are also established reality.

And God guides to his Path whomsoever He wills.
(Translated from the text published in Hama, 1392/1972.
All phrases between round brackets were added by the translator.)

Our readers will also be interested to learn that a publication entitled "*Islamic Creeds - A Selection*" translated by W. Montomery Watt, renders into English the following creeds:

1. The Hanbalites
   Hamid ibn Hanbal
   A Shorter Hanbalite Creed
   A Longer Hanbalite Creed
2. Al-Ash'ari
3. Al-Tahawi
4. The Testament of Abu Hanifah
5. A Later Hanafite Creed [*]
6. Al-Qayrawani
7. Al-Ghazzali
8. Al-Nasafi
9. Al-Lji
10. Al-Sanusi
11. 'Allama-i-Hilli
12. Index -- Total pages 106 © W.M. Watt 1994, Edinburgh University Press Limited, 22 George Square, Edinburgh

* This is Montgomery Watt's translation of *Al-Fiqh Al-Akbar.* Mr. Watt has the following comment preceding the actual translation of the text: "This is the creed called by Wensinck *Al-Fiqh Al-Akbar II.* There is a text (with commentary) in the Hyderabad volume which contains the *Testament,* and this has been used here. This creed also is by an anonymous Hanafite author. Wensinck's suggestion (Muslim Creed, p. 240) that it might be by al-Ash'ari is impossible, because he failed to appreciate the difference in the definition of faith between the Hanafites and the Hanbalites (and al-Ash'ari). The discussion of the attributes of God suggests that this creed is somewhat later than the *Testament.*"